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Georgia Southern to host free mini-conference for special education professionals, registration limited to 100

March 10, 2020

Special education professionals and teacher candidates from across the state are invited to Georgia Southern University on April 4 for the Georgia Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Mini-Conference to be held at the College of Education on the Statesboro Campus from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

“For the past few years, the Georgia CEC has provided grant funding for the Student Council for Exceptional Children (SCEC) chapters to host mini-conferences,” said Karin Fisher, Ph.D., SCEC faculty mentor and GA Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) board member. “This year, Georgia Southern SCEC volunteered to host the mini-conference to give teachers and pre-service students in the southeast an opportunity to network with special educators from across the state and hear from a special education expert.”

The keynote speaker for the mini-conference will be Georgia Department of Education’s (GaDOE) Franeka Colley, who serves as the content integration specialist for special education programming. Colley is a Georgia Southern alumna, earning a bachelor’s in special education from the University in 2007. She also completed an Ed.S. in curriculum and instruction from Lincoln Memorial University and an Ed.S. Certificate in Educational Leadership and Administration from Valdosta State University. Prior to joining the GaDOE, Colley served as a special education classroom teacher, exceptional student education administrator and special education department chair in the Atlanta area.

Attendees will have the opportunity to choose from sessions on topics including: behavior strategies, co-teaching, self-determination, classroom support curriculum, math strategies, the Orton-Gillingham (OG) approach for middle and high school levels, family engagement, and technology.

“While we are inviting special education teachers, preservice teachers, administration and related service providers to join us, all are welcome,” said Fisher. “We are all special education teachers.”

The mini-conference is free to attend and lunch will be provided. Registration is limited to 100, and the deadline to signup is March 27. To register, visit <https://forms.gle/dmMJuD6thmKjesmr9>.

Posted in [COE Sponsored Events](#)

Tags: [Karin Fisher](#), [Student Council for Exceptional Children](#)

Free screening of 'Lillian Smith: Breaking the Silence' on April 9 on Armstrong Campus, open to the public

March 10, 2020



On April 9, producer and director Hal Jacobs will present a free screening of the film, “Lillian Smith: Breaking the Silence,” which documents the largely forgotten story of prominent southern writer and activist Lillian Smith, at the Ogeechee Theatre on Georgia Southern University’s Armstrong Campus in Savannah. The screening will begin at 6 p.m., followed by a Q&A session with Jacobs and Rose Gladney, editor of the 2016 University of Georgia Press compilation, *A Lillian Smith Reader*, who is featured in the film.

“Lillian Smith was a southern writer who was a force to be reckoned with from the 1940s through the early 1960s,” said Jacobs. “She was the first prominent southern author to speak out against segregation.”

Smith’s first novel, *Strange Fruit*, was a national bestseller that offered a bold look at social and sexual relations in a small southern town that strongly resembled her hometown of Jasper, Florida, where she was born in 1897. She lived her adult life in north Georgia with her lifelong partner Paula Snelling, and she continued to write and stay

politically active until her death in 1966.

“Breaking the Silence” explores Smith’s novels and her active stance on racial and gender equality before and during the civil rights movement.

“She was a trusted friend and correspondent of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who in his impassioned *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, included her as ‘one of a small group of those who have written about our struggle in eloquent and prophetic terms,’” said Jacobs. “In fact, in 1960, when King was pulled over in DeKalb County for an alleged traffic violation, Smith was riding in his car. King was driving her to Emory Hospital for the treatment of cancer that plagued her for over 10 years and would eventually take her life.”

Jacobs and his photographer and musician son, Henry, directed and produced the documentary together, “in hopes that Smith’s life and words will inspire more dialogue, more fearlessness and more people breaking the silence well into the future.”

The film screening, hosted by the College of Education’s (COE) Department of Curriculum, Foundations and Reading, is free and open to the public. The screening is a supported event of the COE’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

How a goat named Moonpie is helping special needs students to socialize

March 10, 2020



Meet Moonpie, the therapy goat.

Moonpie may be small, but her impact is mighty. A Nigerian Dwarf goat, Moonpie was born premature and the runt of her litter. Her owner, Tonya Cooper, saw potential in her for a powerful new therapy venture.

“She’s very calm, unlike my other two goats,” said Cooper, a special education instructor for the College of Education at Georgia Southern University. “I started noticing as I would take her places how well she interacted with people and how calm she remained.”

The first place Cooper took

Moonpie was the Tractor Supply in Statesboro.

“I have three goats because I was envisioning having people be able to visit my farm and play with the goats outside in their environment,” she said. “But as I realized Moonpie’s temperament was much calmer than the other two, I would take her places, and she behaved so well around shoppers. People really enjoyed seeing and spending time with her.”

Cooper began to do some research. Animal-assisted therapy has become a commonly practiced technique in the counseling and psychology realms, and one that especially interests Cooper as a teacher educator and special education clinical supervisor for the College of Education.

“Research indicated that goats offer a unique approach to animal-assisted therapy,” said Cooper. “Goats are curious and nosey. They don’t have to have a bond with you to socialize. Instead, they just walk up to you and demand attention.”

These traits prove useful for students with disabilities who struggle with socialization and communication. Goat therapy has been shown to lower anxiety, increase mental stimulation and improve mood and behavior of individuals during and after interaction.

“For students, especially those with disabilities, goat therapy offers them the opportunity to interact without rejection or judgment,” said Cooper. “It’s hard to explain, but when Moonpie goes into schools to visit with the special-needs students, she thrives. She pushes for interaction with those who are hesitant to interact with her, and once she gets to know them, she will crawl into their laps and just want to be held.”

Cooper explained that during one school visit, a student who is nonverbal was scared to interact with Moonpie at first and even ran from her. He continued to watch Moonpie from afar until he finally began to pet and interact with her. Cooper said before they left the school, the young man was walking Moonpie around on her leash showing her to the entire school. The student even allowed Moonpie to crawl into his lap, and he made noises to attempt to communicate with her.

“You just cannot fully understand until you see it for yourself,” said Cooper.

Along with outfits tailored to the occasion, Moonpie now wears her National Service Animal Registry identification. To become a certified therapy animal, Cooper had to complete 60 hours of training with Moonpie in various environments, proving that she was capable of coping with various settings that include loud and quiet areas, floor coverings, stairs and elevators. She also worked with small and large groups of people in a range of communities, from elementary school students to the elderly living in assisted living facilities.

“The hardest part of the training was actually getting people to allow us to come and get the hours completed,” said Cooper. “People are hesitant about the rules or whether a goat will be acceptable in their work and educational settings, but once they have seen Moonpie and interacted with her, we are immediately invited back for another visit.”

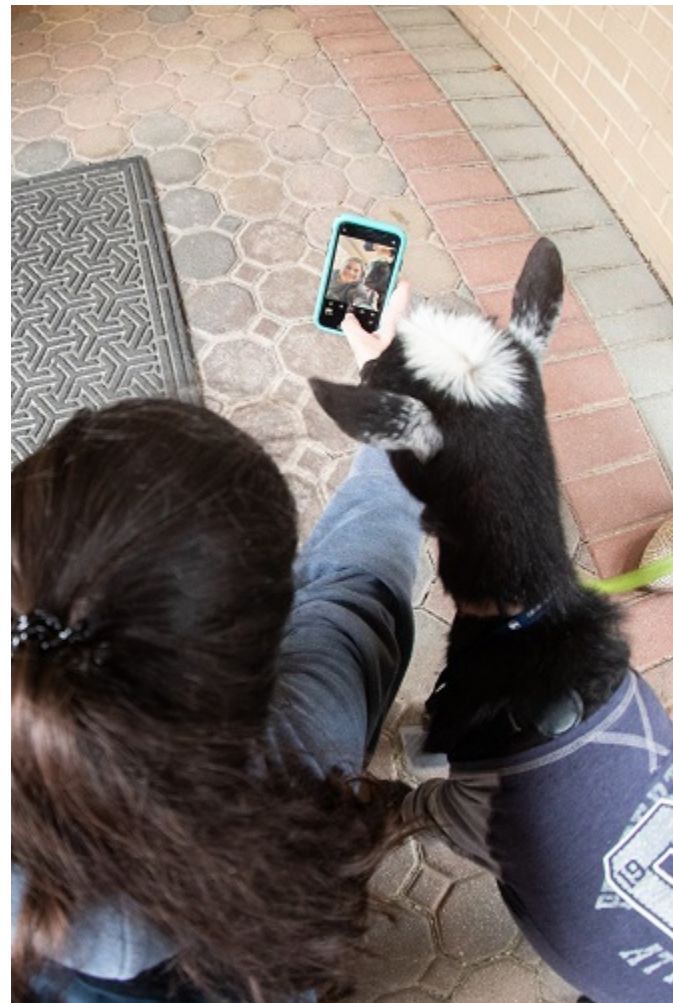
You can find Moonpie in the College of Education on the Statesboro and Armstrong Campuses at least two times per semester.

“It’s a great opportunity for our students to learn about the multitude of ways that you can make a difference for your students in the classroom and enhance their learning abilities,” said Cooper. “Especially when you are preparing teacher candidates to work with students who have special needs or exceptionalities, you have to consider opportunities that may be outside of the normal realm of thinking for teaching practices.

“Moonpie may definitely be outside of the norm for a classroom, but the impact she makes when working with students — especially students with disabilities — is a remarkable experience. She is a special little goat.”

Posted in [Faculty Highlights](#)

Tags: [Special Education](#), [Tonya Cooper](#)



A Moonpie selfie

Turning education into action

March 10, 2020

Counseling student segways college career training, helps break stigma of mental health in Bulloch County



Taylor Folsom is pictured welcoming the families to the first Communities in Action workshop.

Graduate student Joseph Folsom takes a full load of classes, works as a graduate assistant for Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation's student leadership program and is completing an internship at Bulloch Counseling Center. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by the workload, Folsom is exhilarated and eager to help others with what he's learned.

"Not only are these invaluable experiences, but I am enjoying it," said Folsom. "Right now, I'm working toward becoming a counselor who can work with a variety of client populations and their related needs. And I

am getting experience working with career readiness for high school students at Gulfstream and the general public with an array of needs at Bulloch Counseling."

A clinical mental health student in the [M.Ed. Counselor Education program](#) at Georgia Southern University, Folsom recently used the training and preparation of his studies at Georgia Southern's College of Education, as well as his assistantship and internship experiences, to help create a new opportunity for Bulloch County students and parents.

"In the past Bulloch Counseling has done open, broad events," explained Folsom. "I took their scheme and narrowed it. This event gave us an opportunity to really focus on the needs of students and parents in the community."

In collaboration with the administration at Bulloch Counseling Center, his faculty mentor Kristen Dickens, Ph.D., and fellow counseling classmates, Folsom created the Communities In Action (CIA) series, which will be held quarterly for the public. The first workshop of the series was hosted January 25 for children ages six to nine along with their parents or guardians.

"Joseph approached me and the student leaders of our academic honor society, Chi Sigma Iota, to help put together a philanthropic event for the community," said Dickens. "We worked together to develop a plan for the event and solicited volunteers through the counselor program and service organization. I supported his efforts by helping with initial steps and mentoring him through the process, but he really took charge and made this event a great success."

The inaugural CIA event provided separate workshop experiences for the children and adults. The kids participated in several mindfulness activities to assist with anxiety, stress, concentration and overall health. Adults attended a session on active listening, hosted by Folsom.

“We talked about the types of responses we get from children and how our active listening can help us to get the responses we would like to have,” said Folsom.

“Active listening, giving your full attention and physically being present with your child are basic counseling skills. Not only are you speaking back to them, but you are looking at them, not a device, and demonstrating that with actions such as verbal response, eye contact and leaning in.”

Folsom offered the example of telling a child to clean their room.

“Instead of making a general statement like, ‘go clean your room,’ concisely tell them what to do,” explained Folsom. “Tell them more specific expectations such as, ‘fold your clothes and put them in the dresser.’ Tell them what is not correct or what they are doing that you expect to see differently. Sometimes we think we are being clear, when we really are not.”

Folsom also expressed the importance of letting the community know what services the Bulloch Counseling Center offers and helping them have some insight as to what counseling can look like.

“CIA gives the community a glimpse of what mental health workers do outside of the stigma of talking about depression or anxiety,” he explained. “We also assist with family-building skills that we could all use. This place is not only for mental health diagnosis.”

Thanks to a grant received by the Bulloch Counseling Center, Folsom is able to provide the CIA events free of charge and provide incentives for families that participate. For the first event, adults received a \$25 Walmart gift card, and the children were able to take home materials from the activities they participated in during their workshop.

“Larger communities have more of these types of events going on,” said Folsom. “This community doesn’t see a lot of this. Sometimes people are not as willing to say they will participate, but I hope that will change.”

Folsom says it is thanks to the work he is doing at Gulfstream and the Bulloch Counseling Center that he has a clear path for his future.



CIA Workshop Volunteers

“It wasn’t until after I started the counselor education program that I realized it was the counseling aspect that I was looking for,” said Folsom. “I started learning the counseling techniques, and I realized this is it. I enjoy being able to help people know themselves just by reflecting back on what they are telling me.”

When Folsom completes his degree this summer, he hopes to continue working at Bulloch Counseling Center to complete his counselor licensure.

“One thing I want to do is open a community-based clinic,” Folsom said. “Private practice has its limitations. Practicing community health has allowed me to help a wide range of people. I cannot express how rewarding it is to have someone come in and I am able to give them the help they needed. Many of these individuals did not think that help would ever be available to them. They thought they were going to have to live with the difficulties they were facing. But I am there to show them that it can get better.”

Posted in [Student Highlights](#)

Tags: [Joseph Folsom](#), [Kristen Dickens](#), [M.Ed. Counselor Education](#)

[Like mother like daughter, education major inspired to teach others](#)

March 10, 2020



Alexandria Sledge, 2020 Black Women Empowerment Award Recipient

Sophomore elementary education major Alexandria Sledge is quick to praise the women in her life for their strength, independence, dedication to others and for inspiring her to pursue a career in teaching.

“My grandmother raised two children on her own,” said Sledge. “She is really big on helping others. It doesn’t matter what she has going on, she is going to put everything aside to make sure you are okay and have everything you need. The same thing for my mother. She is a fourth grade teacher, and she goes the extra mile to take care of others. I also have a godmother who has been in my life for 18 years, and she runs a daycare and does such a good job that all of the kids keep in touch with her and treat her like family.”

When asked why she wanted to become a teacher, Sledge said she wanted to be just like the women in her life.

From working part-time as a mentor at Savannah’s Deep Center, a nonprofit literacy and arts center for Chatham County youth, to teaching children’s church, Sledge

enjoys helping others. Carrying that passion over to her career aspirations, Sledge said studying elementary education is fun.

"I already envision my classroom as a space that will be open and engaging," she said. "I won't have students come in and just open a book and do a worksheet. I think it's important to balance teaching elementary students both life skills and fundamental concepts."

For Sledge, it was her fourth grade teacher, Lindsey Miller Buck at Marsh Point Elementary School, that made school a place she wanted to be.

"She was a first-year teacher when I had her, and you couldn't even tell," said Sledge. "She taught me everything from how to write a check to the fundamentals in all subject areas. I still keep in touch with her to this day."

Sledge attends Georgia Southern University's Armstrong Campus, so she can remain close to her family and stay active in her community. Born and raised in Savannah, she was once a youth participant at the Deep Center and now works as a mentor in the writing center.

"My work in the Deep writing center really has helped get my feet wet for lesson planning and working with students," said Sledge.

Sledge is currently observing a second grade classroom, an ideal grade she says she would like to teach.

"It's an inclusion classroom with students ranging from gifted to special education, so I am getting to see how everyone learns differently and how the teacher varies her lessons for them," said Sledge. "I really enjoy this class. I am excited to go see them every Tuesday and Thursday."

Her compassion for others, as well as her academic achievements led to her recent acknowledgement as a Georgia Southern 2020 Black Women Empowerment Award honoree. In its second year, the Shine, Black Girl, Shine event is hosted by the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Sledge was one of eight to be honored at the awards event hosted Feb. 29.

"I didn't think I would be a finalist," said Sledge. "When I saw the email saying 'congratulations,' I was so excited. I see other people who are very involved, and I just thought I wouldn't really get it, but my education professor for science, Dr. David Owens, reached out and wanted to nominate me. I am so thankful he did."

"Alexandria stood out as a model student, not just for her own strong performance in the science class, but more so for her willingness and eagerness to share her talents in order to bring her classmates up to speed with concepts she had mastered," said David Owens, Ph.D. "I figured those positive behavior traits were likely manifest in other parts of her life, so I wasn't surprised when Alexandria was selected for this award."

Sledge says she was honored to receive the award with her mother present cheering her on.

"Good deeds come back to you," she said. "It may not happen right away, but some way, somehow, they will come back to you."

Posted in [Student Highlights](#)

Tags: [Alexandria Sledge](#), [David Owens](#)